CHINESE YAM

(U.S. Forest Service photo by James H. Miller via Bugwood.org)

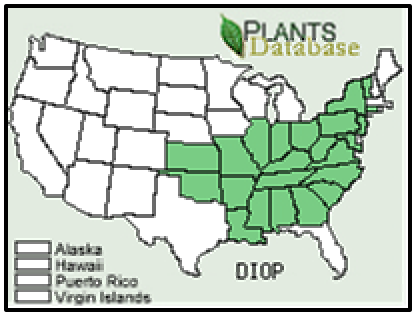
Cinnamon vine, Air potato

Scientific Classification: *Dioscorea oppositifolia* L.

Description: Chinese yam is a deciduous perennial vine native to China. It is a member of the Dioscoreaceae or Yam family. The genus *Dioscorea* has economic value as a food plant and is used as a traditional Chinese medicine. Chinese yam is a creeping and climbing vine that may reach up to 5 meters in height given support from trees and shrubs. The vines twine from left to right. The leaves are acute to acuminate with a cordate (heart-shaped) base. The leaves can be alternate or opposite in arrangement on the stem. Typically, leaves are 4 to 8 cm long and up to 4 cm wide with 7 to 9 veins. The margins, petioles and stems are purplish to red in color. The small yellowish-white flowers arise from the axils of the leaves. The perianth is bell-shaped and the staminate (male) flowers are in bundles, spikes or panicles at the end of the branches. Flowers may have a spicy fragrance similar to cinnamon. Arrangement may be paniculate or spicate. Bulbils or small aerial tubers (0.7 to 3 cm long) are produced in the axils of the leaves. The seeds are borne in a three-angle membranous capsule.

Habitat in the United States Chinese yam is found in rich alluvial soils along streams, seasonal creeks and rivers. It can tolerate semi-xeric sites with rocky soils. It grows in full sun and can tolerate all but the deepest shade. *D. oppositifolia* can be found along roadways, waste places, old home sites, and disturbed areas.

Distribution in the United States:



Chinese Yam ranges from the north eastern states of Vermont, south to Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana, and as far west as Oklahoma.

Severe Threat: Chinese Yam is an exotic plant species that possess characteristics of invasive species and spreads easily into native plant communities and displaces native vegetation.

Current Management Approaches: Mowing or cutting will control the spread of Chinese yam, but will not eradicate it unless it is continued until the root reserves are exhausted. The grubbing method is appropriate for small initial populations or environmentally sensitive areas. Mulching is an effective control on small infestations or in areas where herbicides cannot be used. Herbicidal Controls with Foliar Spray Method (Glyphosate or Triclopyr) to control large populations. The most effective time to treat plants is after the leaves are fully expanded but before the aerial tubers are ripe.

Reference: USDA Plants Database Southeast Exotic Pest Plant Council Invasive.org